responsible for the detailed exploration for minerals. The foreign Consultants are also engaged from time to time, if need be, for exploration of minerals. MECL is presently carrying out detailed exploration for copper around Khetri Copper deposit in Rajasthan. M/s Robertson Research, Australia and M/s Bishimetal Exploration Co. Ltd., Japan were engaged for carrying out of the detailed exploration for copper in Singhbhum copper belt in Bihar and Malanjkhand Copper belt in Madhya Pradesh respectively. HCL has conceived a plan to expand the capacity of its existing smelter at Khetri Copper Complex, Rajasthan from 31,000 tpa to 1 lakh tpa and also copper mines at Surda and Rakha in Eastern Region and Kolihan in Western Region to augment production of copper.

Expansion Programmes of Malanjkhand and Khetri Projects of HCL

190. SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD : Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that the public sector Hindustan Copper Limited has been scouting for overseas investors for its Malanjkhand and Khetri expansion projects;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the HCL plans have suffered a set-back due to import liberalisation and steep fall in internitional copper prices ; and

(c) if so, whether Government would consider lending HCL adequate budgetory support atleast for the proposed Malanjkhand integrated project for its being in the core industrial sector ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF MINES (SHRI BALRAM SINGH YADAV) : (a) and (b) Due to steep fall in international copper prices, the financial health of the Hindustan Copper Limited (HCL), the sole indigenous producer of primary copper in the country, has been affected. Therefore, the company has been looking for financial assistance for implementation of its various schemes. A review of expansion schemes indicates that the setting up of a smelter at Malanjkhand based on indigenous copper concentrates is not presently viable. However, expansion of existing Smelter at KCC with imported concentrates is considered economically viable and accordingly, this project has been assigned priority.

(c) In view of the reply in respect of Malanjkhand Copper Project given above question does not arise.

Investment by Multinational Companies in Minerals

191. MISS. SAROJ KHAPARDE : Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that multinational companies are keen on investing on minerals in India ; and

(b) if so, the details thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTERY OF MINES (SHRI BALRAM SINGH YADAV) : (a) and (b) The National Mineral Policy placed before this House on 5-3-1993 liberalises further the conditions pertaining to foreign investment in the mining sector has generated interest amongst foreign mining companies. Effect of these will show after consequential amendments to the Mines and Minerals (Regulation and Development) Act, 1957, have been made.

Illegal Mining of Precious Stones

192. SHRI G. G. SWELL : Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that large quantities of precious stones (cat's eye, garnet, rubies, diamonds) are being illegally mined in Koderma district of Bihar and Kalahandi and Bolangir districts of Orissa ;

(b) whether these precious stones found their way to Punjab, Rajasthan and abroad ; and

(c) whether it is also a fact that the Geological Survey of India failed to notice the existence of these precious stones in these districts, if so, the details thereof ?